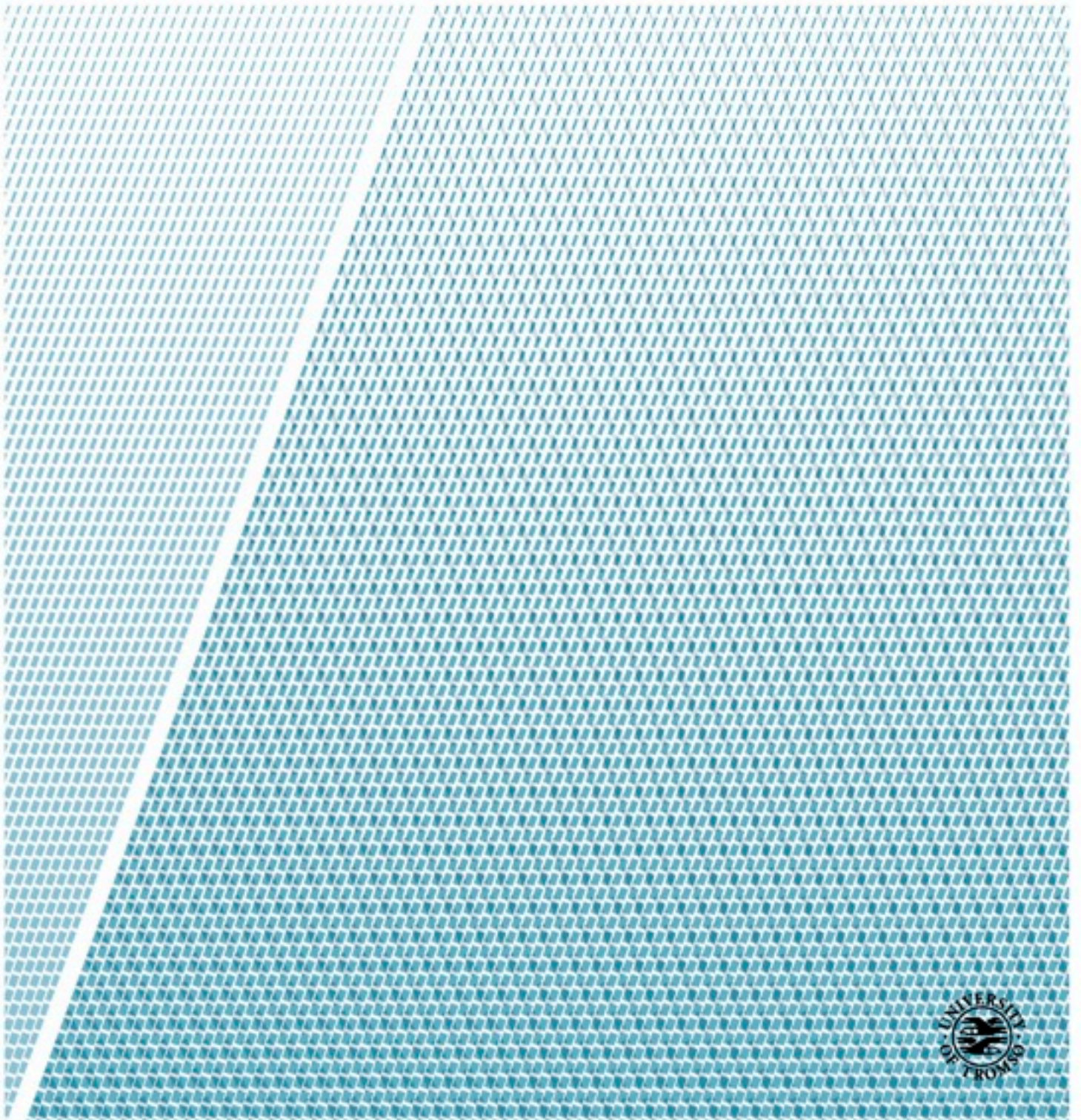


**Expectations Thwarted**  
**Support and conflict in an urban later life family,**  
**Guanajuato, Mexico**

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## **Abstract**

This research thesis is based on participant observation conducted with and without a movie camera with a family consisting of 94 year old Dolores, 54 year old Leticia and 27 year old Rodrigo from Guanajuato City in Central Mexico. By carrying out fieldwork in the months of April to August 2012 I have explored care-dynamics in the family and how their relationships unfold within the ever changing and unstable characteristics of modernity. The three generations all experience expectations, norms and ideals on what family support “*should be like*”, however the actual reality that the individuals experience sometimes fail to live up to these expectations. The family struggle to live up to the ideas of coexistence and to support each other in their everyday lives. Why do they struggle? And why are the behaviours and emotions of this urban later life family at odds with local notions of family care?



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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my dear mormor, and to my abuelita in Guanajuato, Dolores.





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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will start to describe some of the past history of Guanajuato City, as well as how I got to know the family. I will do this for the sake of inviting you as a reader into the complex social landscape in which the fieldwork was conducted. I will also explain shortly how my naive, romantic and simplistic thoughts of family union in Mexico got altered when I met the actual reality of the life situations of the family in the field.

## 1.1 GUANAJUATO CITY

The city of Guanajuato with its approximately 171 000 inhabitants<sup>1</sup> is placed in a narrow alley in the geographical centre of Mexico. The visual aspect of the city is like a dream to a student in ethnographic film making like myself. The colourful houses, the labyrinths of small charming pass ways, and the orange afternoon sun that puts a layer of warmth and beauty on peoples faces, and on the locations. The sounds. Full of life. Making me feel close to people and in movement, even if I close my eyes and stand still. It was that same naive feeling of joy and presence to the city and its people, that later in the fieldwork filled me up with a need for quiet and space. Too much intensity. Too many hardships. Too many people. My local friend Leticia expressed it several times, that she would like to go to a quiet place, maybe borrow her brother's summerhouse for some time, or go to Venus or Mars, to get a break from her life in the city.

It used to be quiet in Guanajuato. Just the sound of a tributary of Mexicos second largest river, the Lerma River went through the landscape. The place was a scarcely populated mountainous area, and was called the place of metal, the place of straw and the hilly place of frogs by the indigenous groups that used the natural resources in the mountainsides. Although the indigenous populations had done mining for many years in the area, the city grew out due to the discovery and exploitation of the silver mines by the spaniards in the 1540s. The colonisers with their economical interest in the minerals started to construct buildings and

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<sup>1</sup> INEGI 2010: <http://www3.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/mexicocifras/default.aspx?e=11> Accessed 14.02.2014

houses due to the unwieldily typography of nature, and uncountable steep and curved alleys, today known as callejones was developed in the mountainsides.

Throughout the expansion and the colonization of the city Guanajuato became a contact zone, “a space where cultures met, clashed, and grappled with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (Pratt, 1991:34 in Rodriguez 2012:3). The mines filled with prosperous minerals resulted in what Ferdinand Tönnies, a sociologist and philosopher has called “a tension between interests of capital and labour in the city, and a division by social class” (in Flanagan 2010:73). According to the Art Professor Karen Rodríguez at the University of Guanajuato the upper classes in Guanajuato City today might be 4th cousins of landowners that goes all the way back to the colonial period. They might have little money and no real important professions, and their somewhat nebulous connection to the upper class identity might create insecurity among them and a need to find ways to reinforce and strengthen their upper class identity. This reinforcement is often done in the way that the self-identified upper classes goes to important social events and have social relationships with each other. There is little mobility among the classes and the lower classes are often avoided and even feared by the upper classes. The neighborhoods in the city known as *colonias* or *barrios* are according to the Professor definitely not upper class. In the curved and steep alleyways that makes up the various neighborhoods in and close to the city centre there are gang issues, a high rate of both domestic violence, drug and alcohol addiction and underemployment<sup>2</sup>.

Though the city might seem little Guanajuato City is a “large scale society” which means that it is heterogeneous and complex. According to marxist anthropologist Eric Wolf the way to understand a complex society is to “study smaller units within the complex society”. He mentions that there are mainly two structural levels in a complex society: that of national formal institutions, and that of informal interpersonal relationships. By describing an analyzing informal interpersonal relationships such as kinship and friendship one can reveal a great deal about the hidden mechanisms of a complex society. In this thesis this is exactly what I will strive to do through one specific Guanajuatense family and their social

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<sup>2</sup> E-mails written with Karen Rodríguez November 2012.

relationships. Wolf highlights how impersonal relationships are often morally more important to the characters than the formal structures themselves. The informal systems are “*supplementary to the system: and they operate and exist by virtue of its existence, which is logically if not temporally, prior to them*” (Wolf 1966b:2).

## 1.2 GETTING TO KNOW THE FAMILY

I came to Guanajuato City the first time in January 2010. As a part of my Bachelors in Social Anthropology from the University in Bergen in Norway I was going to spend two semesters as an exchange student at the University of Guanajuato. Together with other exchange students I was often doing homework for the Spanish classes at a cafe located at a little circular marketplace called *Plaza de Baratillo*. The little charming open market was placed at the very end of the neighbourhood Alameda, or as the locals called it; *barrio* or *colonia Alameda*. Just across a street from the marketplace the very downtown of the city started, *colonia Zona Centro*, known among locals and tourists for its main garden el Jardín Union, Teatro Juárez, and a lot of restaurants, bars, hotels, churches and galleries.

In the middle of the little market there was a fountain, and on the sidewalks around it there were a *tienda* (a tiny grocery shop), a fruit shop, a take-away pizza place, a cybercafe and Antik cafe, the cafe where we foreign students did our homework. The circular plaza soon became my best friend. I loved the sight of the street vendors with portable trolleys that were selling *gorditas*, *tacos*, *tamales*, *elote* and all kind of Mexican traditional food stored in buckets. I liked the sight of the middle aged woman that sat on a bench behind colourful flowers, and the woman who always had a scarf on her head and was selling second hand clothes, shoes and jelly. The plaza had a vibrant life and its rhythm changed due to the time of the day. When my spanish-lessons ended I could be lucky to still get some food from Doña Cubeta, an old woman who smiled with few teeth and always offered everyone some extra tortillas. When Doña Cubeta’s buckets of food where empty around 2 o’ clock a wife and her husband with even bigger buckets would arrive with their adolescent children and sell food

until empty around 6 p.m. Then the father and son who always listened to the radio would arrive with their taco-stand and fill up the air with the smell of spicy salsas, chorizo and coriander.

It was one of these evenings when the stray dogs found their way to the taco-stands that I walked through the marketplace with a plastic bag of beers. I had bought them for the spring semester's welcome party that two French girls would arrange in the apartment they rented just above the marketplace in one of the alleyways near the market. The woman with a purple scarf on her head who normally sold shoes and jelly at the market during the day sat on a bench outside the cybercafe. When I came closer towards her she looked at me and asked; "*¿Cómo estás?*" / "*How are you?*". We started to mingle. I was happy to speak spanish with a local. Most of the exchange students only wanted to talk in English or in their mother tongue, and the local and national students had not arrived to start their semester yet. I told the woman that I was fine, and that I was looking forward to go to a party with some students later on. The jelly woman said she really liked to go to parties. I mentioned that maybe she could come with me, if she wanted to, assuming that she actually would not accept the offer as she did not know me or the others, and by the fact that she was much older than me, she was about 50 years old and I was 23 years old. To my surprise she said she wanted to go to the party. Her laughter and her jokes made me comfortable and happy. What a funny woman with a laugh as pure as a child, I thought. I liked her from the very beginning. Her name was Leticia, "*but everyone here calls me Lety*", she said. Though I came along well with Leticia I did not know if I wanted her to come to the party. I was recently getting to know the other exchange students and I did not know if people would appreciate that I showed up at the party with a person who was not invited, a person who also was much older than us. At least, you do not do that in Norway were I grew up. I told her that I was meeting up with some friends at 9 pm. at a restaurant, and from there we would go to the party. If she decided to come she could meet us there. I was nervous the whole evening, I did not know if she would come or not. Why could I not act out of rationality instead of spontaneity?

She arrived at the restaurant. We all went to the party and I was revealed when I saw that the French girls had invited their neighbour, a violin musician at the same age as Leticia. The two of them knew each other from before and they started to drink, sing, make jokes and laugh a

lot. Leticia walked elegantly drunk from the party, down the alleyway to the circular market pretending she was a rich woman with a sunhat, who walked on a beach side in Austria. We separated at Plaza de Baratillo. I saw Leticia again the next day. She was sitting in the shadow on a bench nearby the woman who sold flowers. She told me she felt sick of the alcohol and that it was not good for her to drink because she had diabetes. The days passed by. I lived my life as a student and sometimes I mingled a bit with her at the market place whenever I saw her there.

One day Leticia invited me to her home to meet her mother. We had to walk up and pass Doña Cubeta, and into a steep and narrow alley in the neighbourhood of Alameda. In the alley the cars could not pass. The cobblestone road smelled of urine, and garbage was thrown on the ground, but despite that there was a likeable passage thanks to the colourful brick houses on each side of the street. Leticia was commenting upon little details that could help me to recognise the way for the future, but to me it seemed like a labyrinth of cross and turns.

Leticia's house was a little terra cotta coloured house situated on a hill at the end of an alley. It was shaped almost like two sugar cubes put on top of each other, and each floor had its own door. I had never seen such a nice little house before. Her mother's name was Dolores and she was sitting on a bed at the first floor with a walker placed beside her. There was a washing machine, a tiny TV and a wooden cupboard in the room. A big blue mattress was placed on the head in one corner, and old books, earrings, dried flowers, plastic bags, clothes, pictures and scarfs filled up the rest of the room. The cement walls were painted in yellow and a little doll of baby Jesus sat on top of the washing machine with a Roman Catholic rosary, and some pass photos of family members placed on its dress. A tiny bathroom with a shower, a toilet and a sink was placed in one corner, and Leticia had filled up several plastic buckets with water to flush down the toilet. Clothes were hanging to dry from a rod in the shower and inside and outside the windows.

Leticia's mother told me that she used to host students at her place in the past. Dolores used to make food for them and they had their own rooms in her apartment, but now she told me that she was too old and that she needed someone to help to take care of her every day. That was the reason why she was now living in with her daughter Leticia and not in her own apartment anymore. Dolores had white thick hair and even thicker glasses that sometimes made me see her eyes double. Dolores could not leave the little house because of the steep conditions

outside. She could not walk up to the kitchen room either; the wooden stairs were built almost like a ladder with no railing. Leticia was the one who cooked for her mother, and she brought down the food from the kitchen so Dolores could eat on the bed. Leticia told me that the boy on one of the pass photos was her son. His name was Enrique Rodrigo, he was my age and he was living and working at a beach.

I talked with Leticia almost every day at Baratillo, but when I suddenly did not see her there I started to worry. She had been out of sight for more than a week when I decided to walk to her home and knock on her door. “*Quien es? Who is it?*,” she asked with a loud voice that carried through the closed door and the brick walls. I could hear Leticia walking slowly up the wooden stairs inside the house. She opened the door and let me inside. I was surprised when I saw her without the colorful scarf on her head that she always used to wear. Her head had spots where her hair had fallen off, and I understood that maybe her diabetes and health was worse than what I had thought in the first place. She told me she had had a tense discussion with the women who sold flowers beside her at the marketplace. They did not agree upon the fact that they had to pay a fee to the Municipality to be allowed to sit and sell nearby the fountain. Leticia told me she was now walking around to sell the slippers and the jelly. She did not want to pay a fee to a municipality or a government that did not give her anything back. What she got from selling was barely enough for the income of the day.

When I arrived for fieldwork two years later, in April 2012 as a part of my master project in Visual Cultural Studies at the University of Tromsø in Norway, I was hoping to be able to make a film about the caring relationship between Leticia and her mother Dolores there inside their little household. I was amazed and curious about Leticias character and lifestyle, and how she lived and took care of her elderly mother at home. I had the idea that the living arrangement of the two generations living together reflected my idea of Mexico as an collectivistic culture, a culture where individuals do efforts, behave and make choices for the achievement and maintenance of a family-group, rather than for individual ends. I wanted to know more about the two generations and their life together, and how they coped with their life situation. But when I walked through the colorful alleyways of the past and knocked on the kitchen door of steel I realized that Dolores was not living with Leticia anymore. Dolores had moved to a nursing home called *Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres* driven by four

Catholic Sisters a 15 minutes walk from Leticia's house. Leticia's 27 year old son Rodrigo had come back from the beach and was living on a mattress on the floor in the kitchen. He was working at a pasta restaurant in town to get money to start up the university again.

### **1.3 THE FOCUS OF THE THESIS**

The initial idea when starting up the fieldwork had been to focus on the caring relationship between Leticia and her mother within the household unit. How was the two generations taking care of each other, helping each other and supporting one another? When I realised that the composition of family members who lived in the domestic unit had changed, that Dolores had moved to Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres and that Rodrigo was living in with his mother, I did not go away from the idea of family support as inherent to family life as I originally had imagined to explore. Instead of focusing on only Dolores and Leticia I decided to focus on the three generations, and how they supported each other in their everyday lives, despite them living in different household units.

What I through fieldwork came to experience was thus how the family members experienced that caring for one another was not an easy endeavour. The difficulty of caring for one another was the source of deep conflicts when expectations on care where not met. In this thesis I have mainly focused on two of these conflictual cases. First case being Leticia at the IMSS hospital and the quarrel that followed between her and her son afterwards. Second case being about the dynamics that brought Dolores to a nursing home. Through micro and macro analyses I will explore why the conflicts on care emerges. Why do they struggle to live up to the expectations to care for one another? And why are the behaviours and emotions of this urban later life family sometimes at odds with local notions of family care? I explored how



## **CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACH**

In this chapter I will discuss the various methods that I used within the working method of participant observation, and how these methods enhanced and created the knowledge and insights that I gained for interpreting and understanding the participants in the fieldwork. First I will describe my entrance into the field and how I gained access to film and be part of the everyday lives of the family. The entrance points can be said to be crucial in trying to define the type of communication and relationships that we developed with each other through the five months of fieldwork. I will describe the use of dialogue and the use of the camera in approaching the realities of the family members, as well as other kinds of participant observation methods that was done throughout fieldwork to approach the family members and their lifeworlds.

### **2.1 ENTERING THE FIELD**

*April 2012*

The two first weeks of fieldwork I spent looking for a place to live. I met up with my old friends from Guanajuato and I visited Leticia, Rodrigo and Dolores on daily basis. Though my idea and wish was to film with the family I did not tell them that from the very beginning. The reason for holding back my true hope was the feeling that the family members needed to trust me more before they would let me into their lives with a camera. I told them that I wanted to search for people who would trust me enough to allow me to be part of their lives for many months. Though I did not say that I wanted it to be with them, I think they felt the same as I did, that we were actually the ones who were going to make a film together, at least I sensed that Leticia hoped for it as well.

Leticia and I had developed a friendly relationship from the time I was an exchange student at the University of Guanajuato. And though we had not seen each other for two years our

relationship seemed to be taking up the thread were we had left it. The days spent with Leticia, Dolores and Rodrigo was all about getting to know them better and spend time with them. As I was looking for a place to live I spent time on my own without the family present. I tried to find a place that would be close to the house of Leticia and Rodrigo in case they would allow me to film with them. After having been offered to live on various lugubrious places, among them with a family whose father offered me protection by saying that he was highly respected and feared in the neighborhood, I was lucky to finally find a quiet and safe place to live, in the beginning of *Callejon Puquero*, an alleyway connected with the bigger street *Calzada de Guadalupe*. From Calzade de Guadalupe there was a short tunnel which I could walk through that would lead me straight to Rodrigos and Leticias entrance door. The apartment was owned by the sister of one of my former professors at the University of Guanajuato, and I would share kitchen with a South-Corean girl and a Mexican boy who both attended the University. Considering that I had expensive camera equipment that I had borrowed from my home University in Norway I did not want want to take any risks of being robbed in a silent alleyway, and I wanted to have the opportunity to be transported to the entrance door by one of the green city taxis if I had to reach home after dark. From my new home I could reach the household of Leticia and Rodrigo easily and I could walk down the steep Calzada de Guadalupe and be in the middle of the city center, not to far from Dolores and the nursing home.

When I told Leticia and Rodrigo about the place they were happy that I had found somewhere to live nearby them, but when I answered them on how much I paid for it they looked at me in vain. I paid 2500 pesos (142 euros) in rent pr. month, including internet, gas for the kitchen and gas for hot water. This prize was for me much cheaper than what I could ever dream of paying in rent for a place like that in Norway. Leticia told me I could find something much cheaper, maybe a room that would be five times lower in price. Leticia started to come up with a lot of names of people and alleyways where apartments and rooms had been rented out in the past.

Leticia:

*When I rented out my house many years ago two girls paid me 500 pesos to live here. I am so fed up on how people here in the city use others for the sake of their own benefit!*

I told Leticia it was a middle aged woman together with her husband who owned the place were I was going to live. I started to observe the owners and could see big differences in the economical capital between Leticia and the couple I was renting from. The lady was taking classes in English and sewing. They had an electrical stove in their kitchen and a modern microwave. The size of their house was much bigger than Leticias little “ice cube house”. The couple had a car looked up behind sprinkles, and in the back window of the car they had placed a pro-PAN<sup>3</sup> sticker for the upcoming presidential election that would be the 1st of July. The couple was like the majority of the inhabitants in Guanajuato voting for the conservative party PAN which is said to be more closely linked to the values of the Catholic Church than any of the other main political parties in Mexico. Considering that Guanajuato state is the state in Mexico where most people professes the Catholic religion and where Catholic principles are both socially and legally cherished, it is not strange that most people are pro-PAN. Leticia on the other hand was obviously not one of the majority middle aged women in the city. I could easily understand that she was living and behaving in a manner that was different than what society expected of her. She was “poorer” than them, she did not aim for luxury, but she would use second hand clothes and she would get free vegetables and fruits that were starting to rot in the local fruit shops. She would not use a credit card, though it could be accessible for her, and she would save coins in plastic boxes that she was hiding in her house in case she would need them in the future. Leticias opinions were much more liberal than the opinions of the majority Guanajuatenses her own age. She would vote for the social democratic party PRD<sup>4</sup>, something that she had in common with many liberal students and artists in the city. Or as her son Rodrigo would categorize the PRD-voters: *“they are all pure hippies, people without anything else to do”*. Rodrigo strived for another life style than the lifestyle of his mother. He looked upon his mother as poor. He himself wanted to embrace items like lap tops, iphones and tennis shoes like his friends, and he would gladly work for

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<sup>3</sup> PAN (The National Action Party) is considered right-wing in the mexican political spectrum, and falls within the umbrella of Christian Democracy. PANs economic polices consist of free enterprise, privatization, and liberal reforms, as well as opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion.

<sup>4</sup> PRD ( Party of the Democratic Revolution) is considered to be a left-wing party which works for establishing democratic socialism. They are not in favor of the church

foreign companies if that gave him opportunities to earn better. Leticia on the other hand was against multinational companies, she wanted traditional Mexican producers to remain, something which she experienced was not possible in competition with foreign companies. I felt a bit uncomfortable living in between these two distinct ideological worlds, but at the same time it made me conscious about the distance between people in Guanajuato, based on class identity and ideological thoughts and politics, and also how this diversity in values could exist between a mother and a son. The experience made me also realize the simple lifestyle of Leticia and how it distinguished itself from that of the lives of the majority Guanajuatenses, and how the fact that she did not have a husband was also not the mainstream way to live, at least not in the ideal views of how a woman her age should live. The frustration and vulnerability this reality of difference created in Leticia was to touch upon, but more like being a limitation in her life I experienced that she was observing it and using it as knowledge in her reflections of life and her critical views upon the society that she was part of. I continued to live in Callejon Puquero despite the nervous energy that the situation created in me, a sensation that was created due to being in the middle of a contact-zone where values grappled with each other. After all I had signed a contract with the owners of the apartment, which I learned to get to know from Leticia was not a common thing to do either in the city.

## **2.2 GAINING ACCESS TO FILM**

I started to visit the family early in the mornings. I left the film camera at my place, and decided to spend some time with them before asking them to make a film with them. Rodrigo went to work every Monday to Friday from 10am- 6pm at a pasta restaurant, so in the beginning I spent most time with Leticia. Leticia and I had much in common, we could talk about everything and I was also happy that she went to visit Dolores every day, as my vague film idea was to make a film about how the family cared for one another. At the nursing home we sat down on the beds to talk, and I understood that the visits functioned as company both for Leticia and Dolores. After a week or so I mentioned for Leticia that I would like to make the film with her and her family. She was happy about it and said that she would really like to be part of it. Some days later Leticia told me that she had mentioned the film-idea for her mother. Dolores had said that it was ok with her that I was filming her while I was at the

nursing home visiting her. I wanted to have the acceptance from Rodrigo as well before I started to film, but he did just laugh when I asked about it and did not give me a yes or a no.

Rodrigo and me soon decided that we could make it a routine to go running before he was going to work in the mornings. I thought it was a good idea to use the exercising as an entry point to get to know Rodrigo better, and to get him to trust me so he would accept to let me film with him and his family. The exercise-method did not work. Running and exercising was not a good arena to learn to get to know each other, but we continued to exercise together anyways. We started to eat food after having exercised and this was when Rodrigo and I finally learned to get to know each other better. One day while we were eating Rodrigo told me about his father that had left him when he was a little baby. His father was now living in Colombia with his new family. Rodrigo told me how the two of them had some contact on Facebook, but that he did not want to be so much in touch with him. He said that what he wished for was that his father could support him economically, that he at least could help him in that matter since he did not care about him in any other way. I told Rodrigo about my own story about my father which had similar aspects to it as that one of Rodrigo. It was a natural thing to do, to share personal information, past experiences that made us having something more in common than running. Though he said he did not want to have contact with his father I concluded that Rodrigo was the type of person who did not want to show feelings of vulnerability. A trait that was completely different from that one of his mother, a trait that also made it hard for me to feel really connected with Rodrigo. I considered the conversation as a break through in the relationship between Rodrigo and me, and I tried to behave in such a way that he could understand that together with me he could show feelings of vulnerability. He did not need to be strong and though all the time, as he normally acted when we were exercising together.

Though the plan had been to get the acceptance to film from all the three family members before I started to film I changed my plans. I realized it was quite hard to get Rodrigo to see me as a person who came to make a film, not solely as a person who came to hang out with him I was frustrated about how he wanted to arrange meetings with me, since I would like to arrange the meetings according to his plans with his family and friends. I started to film Leticia one of these mornings in her bedroom after I had been running with Rodrigo. She was

talking on the phone with a friend of hers. Given the room I was filming in, and the fact that she was lying on her bed still, my intentions were to show her that she could trust me, and that she did not need to act differently in front of the camera, but keep on communicating with others as usual and living her life as before. After she hang up the phone I told Leticia that I had filmed. She laughed and said that *“well yeah, I noticed that”*. I explained her how the camera functioned and how she could see the red light on the camera, and at whatever point could tell me if she did not want me to film.

One evening I was going to meet Rodrigo's best friend for the first time, without a camera, just to get to know him. His name was Paolo and they knew each other from childhood when they played basketball together. We were going to the Cine Club. I was happy to meet one of Rodrigo's friends finally. When Paolo came he was quite grumpy. He asked me several times why I did not bring him one of my girlfriends to get to know him. I said that I did not have girlfriends that wanted to be presented for someone, and that my intentions were not to be on a date. Paolo was teasing Rodrigo, smiling and laughing of the fact that I was not there on a date with him. Rodrigo did not say much about it, but I think he understood that we were better off as friends. Together with Paolo and Rodrigo I started to talk about girls, since I realized that was something they were really interested in. Paolo worked as a basketball coach at the University and he was very popular among both girls and the mothers of the children that he trained. My interest in girls converted me from being a potential girlfriend to being that of a friend. Being a friend with Rodrigo made me able to see how he acting cool and macho with his friends, and to learn to get to know him on a level where we talked about his feelings for his father, mother and grandmother, and his dreams in life that he was unsure about. I often felt Rodrigo's anger, disappointment and hurt feelings in the way he behaved and talked, especially towards his mother. Behind his macho masks I saw him in situations where he was fragile and in the need for someone to love him.

After having started to film with Leticia in the mornings I brought the camera to the nursing home. It was in the end of April and I came to film and talk with Dolores in her room in the second floor of the big building where she lived. Dolores was happy that I came. She got a lot of entertainment seeing me with the heavy camera. She was waiting for Leticia to come to visit her. I started to film with her as she was just sitting on her bed in her room at the second

floor in the nursing home. Her natural way of talking to me was asking for Leticia, as she knew I had contact with her on daily basis. While I started filming she would ask: “*Where is Leticia? Do you know if she will come? Did you see her today?*” For Dolores I was a pigeon that could give her information on what Leticia and Rodrigo was doing. She was only getting this information about her daughter and grandson when they came to visit her.

When Rodrigo heard that I had filmed with his grandmother he asked me to film with him as well. He preferred that I filmed with him at his job while he was selling spaghetti and standing outside the restaurant to get people to come and have a look at the menu. Filming at his work place opened new arenas for me to film as his colleges at work invited me to come and film poker nights that they had together on Fridays in the house of the parents of Paolo.

Though my idea was to make a film about the family, I realized soon that the three family members were not spending much of their time together. They often spend time alone, or with me since I was there. And at times they were together with friends or did activities in the city center. If I wanted to make a film with the family and if I wanted to be true to the three generations and their lives I had to focus on their time spent alone and with others, as well as the time they spent together. I realized that my idea of family life was connected to my notions of collectivism, understood as time spent together in the family and time spent caring for each other. The reality of the urban later life family was indeed another one. I had to reconsidered my notion of collectivism, and realize that family collectivity and support was an idea that was not absolute, it was not a fixed category, but was connected to other social relationships and ideas that the family members had outside the family.

## **2.3 PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

### **- WITH AND WITHOUT A MOVIE CAMERA**

As described above I participated in conversations and activities on different locations with both Leticia, Rodrigo and Dolores. Sometimes I used the movie camera and sometimes it was only my presence without the camera. Following Rodrigo, Leticia and Dolores, persons



whose daily lives moved on different locations and with different rhythms naturally created a camera approach that gave room for flexibility and spontaneity. I consciously chose the easiest way to handle the camera, and used only handheld camera, a directional microphone and the camera microphone. This camera-use gave me room for movement, as well as easy transportation from one place to another. The emergence of this camera-use was important for me in getting the family members to identify the camera with me. Not as a camera detached from my personality, but as a camera that was a prolongation of me. Using only the directional and camera microphone, and not a butterfly, also made me limited to staying close to the family members. This is how I would normally keep my nearness and distance to a friend, and how a relationship of trust was created between Rodrigo, Leticia, Dolores and me. By holding the camera in my hands I recorded life events as they happened, communicating to the audiences the experience of “being there” (Grimshaw&Ravetz 2009:26). I was often focusing upon the faces of the characters in filming. I searched for the members meanings in what happened inside the frame through the gestures, movements and language that they used. This way of doing participant observation and making an ethnographic film can be characterized as belonging to the branch of anthropological approaches toward the recording of social and cultural practice that has been called *Observational Cinema* (Grimshaw&Ravetz 2009:3). Observational Cinema can be described as being a method of fieldwork that is grounded in the ethnographic encounter, where the interpretive logic is more sensory and filmic rather than explanatory (Grimshaw&Ravetz 2009:4).

The way I interpreted the characters as emotional beings through the their speech and their non-verbal behavior had very much to do with my personality and the way that I have shaped my understanding of others and myself earlier in life. It is impossible to focus on all aspects on human behavior, but throughout life I have been sensible towards the feelings that others have. I have been especially alert to difficult feelings such as that of sorrow. Since I was a child I have been told to take care of those who are in pain and in need, and I have developed a trait which is that of a listener. A person where people can tell their worries and complaints about life. Through getting to know Dolores, Leticia and Rodrigo on such a level I got access to explore their confusions, disorientations and personal conflicts which I do believe are human universals of pain that exists in everybody, and I felt a moral responsibility in helping them to solve these problems and to make their struggles lighter.

Experiencing the emotional pains of the three generations in the field was a challenge for me as a person, as I easily absorb the pain of others to be my own. It was also a challenge for me as a student in ethnographic filmmaking. How should I approach the reality and respond to the suffering of the family members? What should I do and say when they even asked me for advices? Dolores would often ask me to give advices to Leticia and Rodrigo, and Leticia would often ask me for advices on what she could do to make her relationship with her son better. Rodrigo on the other hand was very judgmental towards his mother, he did not ask for advices, but I sometimes put it upon him or forced him quietly to take actions that could enhance positive outcomes between him and his mother.

After a while my role in the field got to much an insider. I was becoming one of them, and their sorrows and moral dilemmas on care became my own dilemmas and sorrows on care.

## **2.4 METHODS AND KNOWLEDGE CREATION**

The methods used with Dolores, Leticia and Rodrigo in the search for what was of importance of them was first and foremost that I participated with them in various social situations. These social situations took place both within the household, at the nursing home, at Rodrigos work-place and with his friends, at the hospital, as well as on other public arenas out in the city landscape. This made me explore how the family members where part of various groups, which in turn made me see clearer how various forms of roles, values, norms and expectations existed side by side and created a moral dilemmas for the family members on how to behave properly.

The dialogues I had with the family members was also a method that I used to approach the members meanings. Many of these conversations was recorded and made me able to re- listen and look again at clues and symbols to interpret with the help of their non-verbal and verbal communication.

The camera that was a prolongation of myself turned out to be a kind of filmic approach which made it seems like the characters totally forgot about the camera, or did not care that it was there. They knew I was filming when there was a red light and I had told them that at

whatever moment they could ask me to stop. I realized that it never happened that they asked me for that. It seemed like it was important for them in many situations to have someone there who observed everything, or they simply just considered me as being one of them. The filmic material that was created in the relationship between Dolores, Leticia Rodrigo and me was sometimes what I will consider very personal. They could tell or do things in front of the camera and me that I doubt they had told or done in front of anyone else before. They communicated to me that they let me be part of their lives because they trusted me, and they knew that I did not want to do them any harm or that I would judge them. The material that was created on the in all 62 tapes, each tape of 40 minutes, was a huge gift for me as a filmmaker, but also a great responsibility. In the editing of the film I had to think a lot of how to protect the characters from themselves, and how to make a film that would be suitable to share with more people without making others people to judge them for who they were and how they behaved. I would for example not include moments where they burped in front of the camera, or the more serious issues that had to do with accusations of violence or secrets that exposed the characters in what I considered myself as too much information for a non-friend to know.

## **2.5 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES**

In this study I have obtained theoretical inspiration from symbolic interactionism, a perspective originally developed by G.H. Mead, but that has influenced several generations of anthropologists and sociologists after him. Ervin Goffman is one example of a leading social scientist who has worked in and developed this perspective, but also James Spradley on the analysis of social situations. Broadly speaking one can also say that much of the norwegian anthropology has been inspired by this perspective. Fredrik Barth's interactionist perspective can in many ways be said to exist in the extension of Mead and Goffman, although he in his analysis extends beyond the micro- sociology and tries to incorporate second scale levels. The starting point in all these variations of interactionism is however actors in communication who develop identities in a interactive relationship with their surroundings. These theories on interactionism all have an actor-oriented foundation, but Barth also tries to take into account the existing social structures which influence the actions of actors. The importance of the

social structures and the implications they have on norms, rules and values, and for the individuals in the field is clearly evident in my study.

I have also experienced that the dimension of time is important throughout for the family members in the field. Interactions do not only take place in situations, but also in time. Although I have been present in this family's life in two distinct time periods, there is a limitation in the interpretations of interactions in the ethnographic fieldwork due to time. As seen in the study family members tend to make behavioral exchanges in the present that is connected to past exchanges or the lack of such. This is why it has been of importance to try to understand past events and their significance on the interactions that takes place in the present time of fieldwork. The way I have implicated this in the thesis is to put emphasis on the narrative stories of the family members and the critical analyses of these stories. It is often because of past events in family members interactions that good and bad emotions towards one another is stored, and have implications on the interactional exchanges that takes place.

## **2.6 THE FILM: WHAT IS LIFE WITHOUT PROBLEMS?**

As opposed to this written thesis which tends to be more of an analyzation upon family support the film *What is Life Without Problems?* which goes with it is more a sensory tool to explore the family members, get a feeling of them and their relationships and the environment that they are part of. The film was not made to dwell on one certain topic, but more to create an understanding and empathy with the characters and their lives. In creating empathy I believe that people get touched and connected with each other.

My aspiration in filming and participating in the field went thus very well with what Gary Kildea, an inspiring filmmaker and person says about his aim in making the film "*Celso and Cora- A Manilla Story*"; "*The aim is not to make a film to "find out" what happens in the other culture, but to make a story of universal reach, one which make culture gap transparent and to familiarize situation through story*<sup>5</sup>." Another documentarist that has expressed himself in a way that I can relate to and who has made me understand what I wanted to do when filming, and what I want to do in

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<sup>5</sup> Discussion between Gary Kildea and David McDougall about Celso and Cora

the future was the Danish manuscript writer Rasmus Heisterberg. *“Every plot is boring when you talk about them, characters are exciting. Engage in characters and make a story, not a problem.”*<sup>6</sup>

What seems evident in the two statements above is the importance of exploring stories through people, and not using people as a tool for explaining a specific topic one has decided beforehand. In the writing of the thesis I have despite this explored that it is difficult to write ethnography that is based on the same principles as the film, namely to let the reader explore actors and through them gain knowledge about a topic.

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<sup>6</sup> NFI:LAB “Å skrive for dokumentarfilm”, masterklasse for dokumentarister med Rasmus Heisterberg på Filmens Hus Oslo, 4 sept. 2013

# CHAPTER 3: THWARTED EXPECTATIONS ON FAMILY SUPPORT

## 3.1 LETICIA AT THE IMSS HOSPITAL

*20th- 27th of May 2012*

Only one month had passed since I started to film with the family, but it felt like a lifetime. I was exhausted and down after having tried to be a mediator between the family members, a role that was given to me naturally, and which also lied closed to my personality of trying to heal social relationships and to be of help. The last week had been specially challenging as Leticia had been internalized to go through an operation at the IMSS Hospital (The Mexican Social Security Insitute). She had walked in between her doctor and the hospital for several days because of an infection that she had. The doctor sent her to the hospital and the hospital sent her back to her doctor again. Finally she met one of her brothers former coworkers outside the IMSS hospital, he was a doctor and Leticia explained him about her situation and the doctor helped her to be internalized at the hospital.

I went to visit Leticia at the hospital the same day as she sent me an sms about her internalization, but I had to keep my camera stored outside with the security guards, the managment did not allow me to film inside. Leticia shared a room with another woman, and they both waited for an operation. Leticia had written a list with items that she needed to be brought to her to the hospital. She asked me to give the list to Rodrigo. I went to Rodrigos workplace after the visit at the hospital, and I gave the list to Rodrigo. I filmed Rodrigo and his coworkers as they were cleaning up Señor Spagetthi. The cars passed the workplace and suddenly Rodrigo called for me to jump into the car that had stopped outside the restaurant. It was Paolo and he had borrowed the car from his parents. I asked Rodrigo if he was not going to visit his mother, but he was not in a hurry. Paolo, Rodrigo and I drove to the neighbouring city Silao. Paolo was going to pick up some Herbalife products at a stock in a supermarket. Paolos parents had opened a little Herbalife store in the city center, and Paolo was sometimes helping them with the store. On the way back from Silao we drove pass the Teatro Principal and Bar el Incendio, a cantine where Rodrigo often goes which lies close to Plaza de

Baratillo. Paolo and Rodrigo talked about last time Rodrigo was there, and I could only think about the evening when I had met Rodrigo alone in the street with a plastic bottle of mescal inside his jacket. Rodrigo told me that day that none of his friends wanted to go out, so he went to Bar Incendio by himself. I asked him if he wanted to play Scrabble with me and two friends, but he said he wanted to buy some more beer first. He arrived at my place with three caugamas (940ml) of beer. He drank and commented upon the game before he passed out on a mattress. As we approached the city center Paolo asked Rodrigo if he was going to stay over at the hospital with his mother, but Rodrigo told him that he was just going to bring her some things. At the house again Rodrigo collected toothpaste, a handkerchief, toilet paper, deodorant and soap in a plastic bag. Paolo went home to his parents and together Rodrigo and I went with the buss to the hospital in the dark. We were filming and Rodrigo said he was lazy and would prefer to be at home watching television. He also said that he did not like hospitals. He told me about the time when his grandmotehr had fractured her hip and he had visited her at a hospital in Leon. He had sneaked out under some stairs to have a cigarette to calm down, and there, close to where he sat, someone opened a door and he could see dead people inside. Both Rodrigo and Leticia were afraid of death. In Leticias kitchen there was a book named *“La muerte es una ilucion: La superacion definitiva del miedo a morir”*, written by Thich Nhat Hanh a Zen Buddhist munk. Though Leticia was not a Buddhist she was searching for a meaning in life, something to hold on to. Most of the support and comfort she got in searching for meaning in life she gots from the books that she read or the films that she saw at the University Cinema, el Cine Club. I filmed Rodrigo as he reluctantly entered the hospital, and I waited for him outside. He came back again only ten minutes later, and I was surprised that he did not visit his mother for a longer time, after all she was not feeling good and was in a vounlerable sitaution.

Leticia started to ask me for many favors the days when she was in the hospital. She asked me to buy toilet paper, to buy saldo for her mobile-phone, she asked me if Rodrigo was going to come and if I could tell the Catholic Sisters at the nursing home about her situation, as well as if I could look after Dolores who might be worried when her daughter did not come to see her at the nursing home. I gladly helped her with doing what she asked for, but I was all the time thinking about who would have helped Leticia if I was not together with her family doing fieldwork? Was all this not Rodrigos responsibility? Should he not help his mother out of



love for her? Or who was it that would normally help? The nurses and the doctors at the hospital expected that some of Leticias family members would be with her at the hospital. It was normal that a patient had a familiar there to help when the patient needed to go to the bathroom, to tell the nurses if there was anything that was needed, or to look after their family members at night. But as Leticia said “...*the only one who could have been here with me..would have been my mum.. she never left us when we were sick...*”. Dolores could not help her daughter as she used to do in the past, as she needed someone to take care of herself now. And Rodrigo, he was working every day until 6 p.m, and in addition to that he did not like hospitals. It seemed like Rodrigo did not feel responsibility or a wish of supporting his mother, he expressed more anger and resentment than love towards his mother.

I visited Leticia and Dolores everyday, but I did not stay over with Leticia in the hospital at night. Leticia started to feel very lonely at the hospital. Her roommate had someone from her family with her all the time, her family was circulating and visiting her at different hours. The only ones who were visiting Leticia were an old gentleman and friend of Dolores, and la señora Sarita, also a friend of Leticias mother who had been living in the same neighbourhood as the family when Leticias was a child. Coco also visited. Coco was one of the workers at the nursing home *Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres* where Leticias mother lived. The doctors and the nurses at the IMSS hospital were frustrated about the situation of Leticia, as they did not have the capacity to take more care of her more than the other patients. When I visited her one of the last days of her stay at the hospital she told me about her conversation with one of the doctors:

Leticia: - *The doctor asked me: “Don't you have a family that can come and look after you?” I was looking for my toothbrush to go and brush my teeth.. He said to me that he was sure I did not feel at peace since my family did not come here to see me. I told him I had friends who were the once who had visited me.. not my family... I started to feel vey bad.. like my spirit flied up and down, and that I did not want to do anything. Then Chelito one of the nurses came and told me about God. She told me that I should not care if no one was with me, that my sblings were not there with me because God was with me. She told me I had to think that everything was going to be fine. That I would be better and that I was not alone and should not worry about what other people thought.*

Leticia was normally the one coming to visit Dolores everyday, and not the other way around. Leticia was preoccupied by the fact that Dolores would now be most of the time alone, as she

rarely did go downstairs in the nursing home to eat in the common kitchen or watch television with the other residents. Dolores was sitting most of the time alone in her room, she preferred to be in her own company or in the company of her family members. When I went to visit Dolores to tell her that Leticia was hospitalized Dolores started to worry and become very nervous. I tried to ask her how she was doing.

Maria: - *How are you?*

Dolores: - *I am like always, how is she?*

M: *Leticia might need to operate, but they still do not know for sure. And if she has to operate she needs someone to help her in her room afterwards..to be with her.*

D: - *What should we do? Oh my God.*

M: - *How are you?*

D: - *I am only thinking of her, how she is.*

M: - *They do not know if they will operate her or not yet, but she is doing fine.*

D: - *I am going to talk to Chava (her oldest son who is a pensioned doctor)..if Chava can come..but maybe he is in Mexico City..but only Leticia has his telephone number..*

Dolores was thinking out loud.

*D: Who can be with her? Any familiars here we do not have..I can not move.. She needs to talk with her brother..What do we do?*

*M: - If no one from the family can be with her I can be with her..or maybe a friend of hers..*

*D: - No, she does not have friends like that.*

*M: - She is ok, she gets help from the nurses.*

*D: -Yes, but one always need a familiar..I can not even talk with her, to know what she is thinking. I really need a phone..*

I borrowed Dolores my mobile phone so she could call Leticia. I could clearly hear what Leticia was saying through the phone as she was talking really loud so Dolores could be able to hear what she said.

Dolores on the phone: - *How do we do it? Who is going to be with you?*

Leticia: - *Who? I do not know..*

D: *So you are waiting for an..?*

L: - *I think that they maybe will operate me tomorrow.*

D: *Shouldn't you talk with your brothers? They need to know that they have to be with you.*

L: - *I think Chava is in Mexico City.*

D: - *I am here, what can I do? I do not know. Someone like them need to be with you!*

L: - *And If they do not have the opportunity mum?*

D: - *They do not know that you are there Leticia!*

L: - *Even if they know they will not come here.*

D: - *They have to come, Chava has the opportunity to come.*

L: - *They know that they will operate me mum, but they do not answer me because they do not want to come here.*

D: - *What do you mean Leticia? They are occupied, how can you think that they will not come. I am going to call them to hear what they say. Do not stress yourself, ok. Bye.*

Dolores took her walker and hurried outside her room to call for the Sisters at the nursing home who were downstairs. She wanted to ask them to give her the telephone numbers for her sons. I was filming her while she walked stressed and determined towards the cement railing.

Dolores toward me and the camera: - *I am going to talk with the Sister. It is like my daughter does not have a family. They want familiars to be with her. What about the people who do not have anyone? When they operated me the entire family was there... Are you not going to see her there Maria? I am going to talk with the Sister..if she can do me the favour...*

Dolores cried out to get contact with the Sisters who were downstairs. They heard her but overlooked her. The telephone belonging to the nursing home rang, and Dolores screamed and asked if it were her sons. I got frustrated about the way no one paid attention to Dolores in her personal dilemma, and I went downstairs to tell the Sisters that Dolores wanted to talk with them. Dolores got her sons phone-numbers and she got to borrow the telephone belonging to the nursing home. Sister Carmelita helped her to dial the numbers and Dolores could finally talk with Enrique, her youngest son. She told him about what had happened with Leticia, and she asked him to call his sister and visit her now that he knew about Leticias situation.

Dolores expressed relief when saying goodbye to her son. She told him that she felt calmer now that she had talked with him, and that she was happy that she did not have to feel responsible anymore.

It was clear that family as a care institution was of high importance. Even when Leticia was admitted to the hospital for treatment there were expectations that family members should act out both practical and emotional care and to be present in the situation.

### **3.2 LETICIA AT HER HOUSEHOLD AFTER OPERATION** 27th of May 2012

None of Leticia's family members had been able to come to the hospital when Leticia was going through the operation. Even though I knew that my support was not sustainable, I believed it was better that I would support her than no one. Me and a friend of mine from Veracruz who also knew Leticia from the time we were exchange students at the University of Guanajuato were thus the ones who waited for Leticia in her room after her operation. The nurses carefully regulated Leticia's insulin, and they told her that she had to be very careful on what she would eat in the future as the operation wound had to heal, a process which was more difficult for her since she had diabetes and sugar levels that changed like a roller coaster. Rodrigo had come to visit his mother the day before her operation, but the two of them had started to quarrel. Rodrigo had been out drinking with some friends the day before and he showed up with a hangover at the hospital. Leticia had yelled at him that he should not drink that much. Rodrigo had yelled back at her and Leticia had started to cry, which in turn resulted in the entrance of a doctor who told Rodrigo he had to leave the hospital as they disturbed the other patients in the nearby rooms. Sunday the 27th of May Leticia was ready to go home, but Rodrigo did not come as planned to help his mother home in a taxi. I got a text message from Leticia and my friend Enid and I went to the hospital to help her home in one of the green city taxis.

Leticia laid down on her bed at the first floor in her house when she arrived home, and she asked me to go buy some groceries. She also asked me if I could not stay over at night at her place as she felt more secure if there was someone in the house. She needed someone to help her now that her health was reduced, and she was not sure if Rodrigo would be the person who would help her. I was going to sleep on a mattress on the floor beside her bed in the first floor, while Rodrigo would sleep on his mattress at the second floor. I sat beside Leticia and filmed her when the day turned to night, and I asked her how it had been at the hospital since I could not film with her there.

*L: - I feel insecure, I feel afraid in few words.. I wish Rodrigo and me were together and that we helped each other. I am his mum and he is my only son, and I think that if two people can not live together it is better that one separate.*

*M: - Has it always been like this?*

L: - *No, because he lived with my mum. We have never lived together alone before. When you are a single mum you can decide how you want to raise your child, but I let him live with my mum while I went to work, and he says that I never gave him anything. If I didn't care for him I would not be here with him today. I have done many errors with him. I want to say to him that I love him and that we should be together. I have no one. When I was in the hospital I realised I have no one. The only one who could have helped me would be my mum. I am tired. Rodrigo does not help me, it is quite the opposite. I do not want to live like this anymore. I went for him in Mexico City so he could come here to finish the University, but he never believes in the fact that I care about him.*

M: - *Do you care?*

L: - *Yes of course I do. He is my son and I do not like to see him like that. I have always thought about my mum, my siblings and Rodrigo, and I have not thought so much in myself. Now I am thinking that I have to be more egoistic... It is like I need a lot of care, maybe that is what Rodrigo also needs. I really want us to be together. He do not have anyone either. No one that sees him frequently and show him that they care. I know that he also feels alone, when we see that everyone has their family. And his grandmother, she wants to be close to us. I feel bad, I cannot move .. you cannot help it yourself.. you need someone else...Sometimes I feel like I need more courage. And Rodrigo needs a lot of care, that he really is a good person, but he change. My mum says that I do not care about him because I do not have any money. You need money, she says. And money really do solution some things. I cannot work right now, I need a loan. If we could be together he has the power that I do not have. We could help each other.*

M: - *But he has other wishes in life...*

L: - *He wants to use the money in other things than items for the house, sometimes he brings things but...I really want our relationship to be better.*

As I was filming with Leticia Rodrigo knocked on the door downstairs. He had been drinking more and Leticia did not want to let him in. She was angry, afraid and frustrated and Rodrigo told his mother through the wooden door that if she did not open he would go to his grandmother at the nursing home. It was raining heavily and Leticia gave him a jacket through the sprinkles of the door. Rodrigo left. Some time later he came back, he knocked on the door and Leticia decided to open it. I had been filming with her ever since she came back from the hospital and I was filming when he entered the room. Rodrigo had brought a milk and some chocolate that he put on the bed. I told him that he had to try to help his mother in the future to eat better, because her sugar levels might have an influence on how the operation wound would grow. He mocked and told me that it was no point in trying to help her, she drank Coca Cola almost every day anyways even though she knew it was not good for her. He fumbled upstairs. "Dont you start to smoke inside again!" Leticia said with a loud voice so he could hear it. After a while he fell asleep on his madras on the floor in the kitchen. I went to sleep as well, and so did Leticia. The next day the house smelled of smoke odor and besides a sleeping Rodrigo there was an ashtray with cigarette butts in it and the television was on.

As from the conversation with Leticia I can clearly see that Leticia has expectations towards her son that he should help her in her everyday life, and in the maintenance of the household. Her expectations might point to the norms that exist in society of what the role of a grown up son should be like. Norms that also are implemented in the Mexican Constitution, and which say that children are responsible in giving food for their parents<sup>7</sup>. What Leticia sees is that this help that she could receive from her son is threatened due to the feelings that Rodrigo has towards her. She wants to express to Rodrigo that she loves him, so that she can obtain the cooperativeness between the two that she longs for and is dependent upon. She wants her expectation to be an actuality and not only an imagined life-strategy of survival or ideal for the future.

### **3.3 A SORROWFUL DAY IN MESQUETITO 9**

*28th of May 2012*

Early in the morning the next day I took a bus with Rodrigo and was filming with him while he went to pick up a food dispense<sup>8</sup> for his mother in the city office of DIF (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia). Leticia received the food supply once a month by the local government, but she told us not to tell the secretaries that she had went through an operation before we left. If they knew that she was enrolled in the IMSS-program she would loose her right to receive the food dispense. Leticia had been lucky to get a foot inside IMSS through her brother Enrique who worked as a doctor and who could apply for familiars to enter the program. The years had passed and Leticia had to pay an amount of money each year to continue in the programme, an amount which was on her priority on what to spend money on. Rodrigo drank lots and lots of water on the way to the DIF-office. He was tired and the heat of the sun was

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<sup>7</sup> Constitucion Politica de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos: Articulo 314 Codigo Civil: *“Children are obligated to give food for their parents. If the children are unable to do so the responsibility is that of the closest descendants.”* Free translation by Maria Isabelle Mikalsen.

<sup>8</sup> Leticia gets a monthly dispense from the government which consist of a package of jelly, 1 kg rice, 1 package of pasta, 4 rolls toilet paper, cornflakes, olive oil, 1 kg beans, 1 kg sugar and sometimes a box of tuna. DIF Municipal (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia) are in charge of the city office and a branch of it called “Social Assistance”. In this program there are 148 persons from the urban area that receive the dispense, these people are people who cannot work or do not have a job. In addition they give out 44 dispenses to persons above the age of 70 years old, these groups are characterized as *“vulnerable subjects, jubilated, little money and often alone”*. People who receive this support can both be from the city or from the outskirt communities. DIF on a state level give the same kind of support.

an enemy for a young man who had been drinking alcohol throughout an entire weekend. When we arrived at the office the secretaries told us that we had to come back the next days because the dispences had not arrived the office yet. Coming back from the failed dispencc- trip Rodrigo and I were waiting for the breakfast that Leticia made. Leticia wore a light pink fleece sweater and a wide blue cutton trouser and was standing in the little corner kitchen in front of the gas stove. She moved slowly as her body was in pain after the operation, and she was afraid that her wound would not grow properly.

Rodrigo talked towards me and the camera criticising his mother who he knew was perfectly aware of what he was saying.

**Rodrigo (R):** *She doesn't have any friends.. and she is not working!*

**Leticia (L):** *He doesn't want to give me anything, I need to go around him like a beggar to get the money..you don't give me anything..*

I could hear the sound of Leticias firm, irritated and complaining voice through the aggressive sound of oil frying in the pan.

**R:** *- When I asked you for a favour once you told me I had to pay you 10 pesos for it..so now I am going to charge you 30 pesos to go all the way to Noria Alta (to pick up the dispense) for you. I will charge you for the buss, and the favour.*

**L:** *- You live here I should charge you for living here.*

**R:** *- Well do it.*

**L:** *- You don't want to give anything*

**R:** *- Don't I give you for electricity or gas or anything?*

**L:** *- I need to beg from you for you to give me money.*

**R:** *- You gave me 30 pesos, but I went with the bus which was 10 pesos to get your dispense..So why do you still want all the 30 pesos back?*

**L:** *- I am also going to charge you to stay here..*

**R:** *-You want that someone is going to take care of you just because you say... oh this is what is happening to me, I am so sick, come and look after me..please, I am so sick..*

Rodrigo walked towards his mother with an angry grin, he was putting his underlip out while talking and he curved his back to demonstrate how Leticia do to make people fell sorry for her.

*L: - Look for a place to stay so the problems will end!*

*R: - With you it will never end, its okay, no problem, and I hope you will die!*

Rodrigo slammed the door and walked out. He came back some time later. They sat down together at the kitchen table with the eggs in front of them, I was still filming and they didn't tell me to cut it, nor did they care about me being there as all their engagement was directed towards the other.

*L: - I have been working, don't start again! It is better that you look for a place to stay.. You only give for the services..I prefer to be alone, I will pay my things even though you are not here..I have lived without you before.*

*R: - Yes always! You have always lived without me, you and Alphonso! Thats some parents that are really responsible! Why did you have children?*

*L: - Do you think that I should maintain you all my life?*

*R: - How do you maintain me? I only ask you to give me the opportunity to be here..*

*L: - I did what I could when you were young..I will not maintain you all the time. You think everyone will help you all the time!*

*R: -You as well! Why did you and Alphonso get me? The one who brought me up was my grandmother!*

*L: - So I never maintained you?*

*R: - No.*

*L: - So why are you here?*

*R: - Because you are my mum.. you get angry because I compare you with the mum of Paolo and Isaac..*

*L: - Their parents are not me.. they have their life and I have mine.*

*R: - So why don't you work?*

*L: - That is my problem, I don't ask you for anything.*

*R: - You also ask Maria.*

*L: - We cannot live together, look for a place to stay. If you really hate me that much you should go somewhere else...*

Leticia stood up from the kitchen table and sat down at a straw chair close to the entrance door.

*R: - Okay! The other mums don't call the police for example..even though my friends also drinks..*

*L: - Oh, shut up please.. If you go out again I am not opening the door.*

*R: - What a envy!*

*L: - It is not envy, I have lived my life like I wanted to.. in nothing I am jealous!*

*R: - Give me the money!*

*L: - I am not going to give you anything, you used all the services.. how much did I charge you to live here? Go away. Go away. You should go away tomorrow.*

*R: - You say that I don't give you anything but I do.. That people learn to get to know you..I give her money but she says that I don't, you are such a liar! That they learn to get to know you!*



*L: - Thats why I don't want that you drink.*

*R: - It is so hard for you to use money. Don't be a liar mum, I pay you the services.. Why do you go!?*

Leticia walks downstairs to her bedroom, and Rodrigo sits back on one of the wooden kitchen chairs and he cries. He comes to give me a hug and he says to me:

*R: - Since I was a child she has wanted me to sell chewing gum in the busses!*

Rodrigo feels that his mother did not support him in the past. Instead of being the one who worked and helped him economically to have an education in the past, she wanted him to work to help her in the survival of the household.

### **3.4 THWARTED EXPECTATIONS- AN ANALYSIS**

The painful experiences that Dolores, Leticia and Rodrigo confront in the situations as described above are all connected to expectations on family support and union gone wrong. The three generations all wish for a family that is united and a family that is supportive to one another, but when Leticia waits for the operation at the hospital the opposite become visible. The family is not united, not supportive, no one comes to visit Leticia at the hospital. The realisation that her family did not come to see her as was expected and wished for both from Leticia herself and from the nurses and the doctors at the IMSS Hospital was extremely hurtful for Leticia. It made her believe her family did not care about her or love her, she felt more lonely than she had ever felt in her entire life, and she started to question her own self-worth and existence. The fact that the absence of her family members had such a deep emotional reaction in Leticia can thus point to how important family is for the well-being of an individual in a contemporary Mexican city like Guanajuato. The fact that the doctors and the nurses at the IMSS hospital expected that Leticias family members should be present both day and night to look after her at the hospital also shows the way family, and not the welfare system is expected to take responsibility and provide the main care for the individuals at the hospital (Katz &Lowenstein in Izhuara 2010:29). When I visited Leticia in her room at the hospital the workers expected me to follow Leticia to the bathroom and to be the link of contact between Leticia and the doctors and nurses. A visiting family member would thus have a double function at the hospital in that he or she would be a practical helper for the

workers at the hospital, and be a practical helper and psychological support for their family member. The experience at the hospital made Leticia and those who were present at the hospital aware of how Leticia was disconnected from her family (Starthern 2005:26 in Han 2012:5), a realization Leticia would not have known if it were not for the absence of exchange of care that took place in the situation.

There were many reasons to draw in trying to understand the circumstances that led to the unhappy situation. The reasons behind that no one was coming could be both because of structural constraints that her family members confronted which made it difficult or impossible for them to go. For Dolores it was her dependency, the need of help from others that made her unable to go to visit her daughter at the hospital. Even though she wanted to be at the hospital with her daughter it was hard for her to leave the nursing home without receiving help from someone to transport her there. On the other hand, Dolores did not completely accept the constraints that was put upon her. Within the limitations of social structures she exercised agency when she called her sons (Izuhara 2010:4). She used her willpower, her ability to act and to make choices when she called Leticias brothers and asked them to talk with and visit Leticia. The behaviour of Dolores can be understood both as a product of structure and as a product of her agency. The reasons why Leticias siblings did not come to give their sister a visit can also be interpreted within these components of structural constraints and agency opportunities. The structural constraints might be other responsibilities that they had such as for example work. Enrique, the son that Dolores talked to was for example a doctor for cancer patients at two different hospitals, a responsibility which made him have little free-time to leave Leon where he was living to take care of his family member. The fact that Leticias siblings lived geographically far away might also be a structural constraint, or as was the case for at least Leticias sisters, they did not know about their sisters situation due to a lack of communication. But within these circumstances did the family members that knew about the situation have an opportunity to act and make a choice. Taking into consideration that Leticia and her siblings had had a complicated relationship since Dolores moved to the nursing home, it might be the case that the siblings who lived outside Guanajuato decided not to go as some kind of sanction or punishment towards their sister. Sanctions that were based on hard feelings that they had towards her due to acts Leticia had done or not done in the past. Though Rodrigo came for short periods, he did have the

opportunity to visit his mother more often. He was working until 6 p.m at Señor Spagetti and had the opportunity to visit her in the evening, but he preferred not to. One of the reasons was that he did not like hospitals, and another reason has to be seen in a historical-perspective on how Rodrigo experience that his mother has never cared for him and supported him in the past. Rodrigo carries lots of resented feelings towards his mother, feelings which in turn have an implication on how he behaves and acts in interaction with his mother. He thus preferred to work, be with friends and go to parties instead.

The choices the individuals in the family has on how to act, implicitly tells something about the human condition in a city, and the dilemmas on morality that individuals confront in their everyday lives.

### **3.5 FAMILY LIFE AS SUPPORTIVE AND CONFLICTUAL**

Despite that the family does not live up to the expectations of care in the situation with Leticia in the hospital, it is possible to see that supportive acts does exist in the family. The family members feel both pressure and a will to care. Both Dolores and Rodrigo are in some ways making small exchanges of care in the acts that they do, like for example calling Leticias siblings, bringing items for Leticia to the hospital and visiting her even for a short while when hungover. In the quarrel between Leticia and Rodrigo it also becomes visible how mother and son try to support one another. Rodrigo does favors for Leticia, and Leticia lets her son live in with her so he does not have to pay a rent. They have also tried to set a rule in the household, a rule which they have both agreed upon, and that is that it is the responsibility of both of them to share the expenses of electricity, gas, water and expenses for the telephone. They try to support one another, after all they are family members and should care for one another. Leticia and Rodrigo live together and they try to cooperate, but the affective sentiments they have towards each other are struggling due to the past, and they have different norms and expectation on what a good life is. They have difficulties in liking each other, and they feel different from one another. In their behaviour towards each other they express feelings of hate more than love, and they experience more hostility than companionship when they communicate. These social behaviours that they communicate can be seen as an exchange, which is a perspective that is buildt on the theory of exchange. Participants in a behavioural

exchange will continue their exchange only as long as the exchange is perceived as more rewarding than costly (Katz&Lowenstein 2010: 32). Leticias comment to Rodrigo in the quarrel between the two, the comment that he should leave the house so the problems would end, can be seen in this perspective. She experience the behavioural exchanges between herself and her son as more negative than positive, and tries to make a solution for the problem by suggesting that they should separate.

*The intergenerational solidarity framework integrates exchange theory suggesting that individuals with resources to exchange are those who can provide various types of help and support, while the recipients of help and support are made dependent upon the providers, thereby weakening their power in the relationship (hirdes and Strain 1995 in Katz& Lowenstein 2010: 32).*

In the quarrel between Leticia and Rodrigo they are both aggressively communicating expectations that they have towards one another. And in opposition to the statement above there is no clear distinction between who is the provider and who is the recipient in their relationship of care. They both expect the other to give economical support. Leticia feels that her grown up son should help her more to buy items for the house. She does not have a job and he does. She feels like her health-problems justify her need for support and the fact that she does not have a normal job. Rodrigo in her opinion is young and strong and could help her more in the daily doings of life. Rodrigo on the other hand feels like her mother should help him to pay the University inscriptions and the material for school like the other parents of his friends does. His bestfriend Paolo can use all the money that he earns from his job as a basketball-coach for cultural activities and personal amuzement such as clothes, iphone, food and parties. His own mother gives him nothing but a place to live and she has never given him anything in the past either. Besides the expectations of economical support that the two have towards each other Rodrigo also expect his mother to get a job. Though Leticia work in the informal economy Rodrigo wants her to have a stable job, which in turn will make her less dependent upon him, and which will make her more similar to the parent of his friends which he looks up to and which fits into society. He wants her to become more self-sustained. Leticia expects her son to stop drinking and spending a lot of money on alcohol. And last but not least Rodrigo expects his mother to understand that he feels abandoned by her and his father in the past, while Leticia expects Rodrigo to understand that she did everything she could for him while he was a child. Despite the effort on trying to be supportive the

incompatible needs of the two family members and their lack of understanding for the perspective of the other stands in the way for the peace between them.

The family roles and the norms and expectations connected to them are also not clear for the two family members when it comes to economical providance in the present. And the fact that the conflict escaletes can be seen in the light of the building blocks of solidarity that classical theories of social psychlogy of group dynamics are buildt upon. These building blocks consist of emotional cohesion (affect), social contact (association), geographical distance (structure), supportive behaviours (function), filial obligations (norms) and attitudinal agreement (consensus) (Katz&Lowenstein 2010:33). Rodrigo and Leticia have problems in their face to face contact with each other. They struggle in the fields of emotional cohesion, supportive behaviours, to perform roles and obligations as well as agree upon values, attitudes and beliefs. Or to say it in another way, they have a hard time identifying themselves in the other. The lifestyle of Leticia and Rodrigo is thus going drastically against how some theories highlight the survival strategies of “poor” households, namely that family members within a household are connected units that aim towards a common goal. The domestic space has often been idealised and seen purely as a “shelter” and life’s adversities has been put aside (Enrique Rosas 2002:82). According to Gonzalez de la Rocha, an Mexican anthropologist who has done fieldwork in poor households in the capital city Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco:

*Households are highly contradictory social units that are characterized by the coexistence of solidarity and the confrontation of **individual versus collective interests, gender and age conflicts**, and violence... Housholds are social settings in which daily confrontations and negotiations are developed in a context of internal inequality and differential distribution of burdens and rewards”(Gonzalez de la Rocha 2001:79).*

First of all the household is not a unit where there is a common agreement between mother and son that the house is going to be a place where they are going to live together through time. As the confrontations and problems between the two generation escalates, and as Rodrigo sees the difficulty of survival and live a good life in the city where he can afford items and a lifestyle that reflected his wish, he starts to think more and more about moving back to the beach where he used to work where he can earn more money. He is not sure if the household was a unit where his loyalty is connected, but he is constantly dragged in between

the expectations for him to support his mother, as well as the expectations for him to gain a work which in turn could make him able to help sustain a future girlfriend.

There were no common goals for the future in between mother and son. Leticia wished for Rodrigo to stay, at the same time she was threatening him to leave because the problems between the two. She asked Caspar, one informal bricklayer that sometimes helped her with practicalities in connection with the house how much he would have for constructing one more floor at the house, so Rodrigo could live there. With one son she could only see that as an opportunity if he was going to help take care of her in the future, though she believed her destiny was to live in a nursing home, which she would have to pay for. She would then have to sell her apartment, and leave nothing for Rodrigo. She would have to use what she had to take care of herself. Leticia looked upon a good life as her son supporting her in the future, while Rodrigo did not see family support as the idea for the future, his idea was rather to go somewhere to get a job and to get a girlfriend.

## CHAPTER 4: DOLORES AT THE NURSING HOME

### 4.1 EXPECTATIONS OF ELDERLY CARE IN THE CITY

Throughout fieldwork I talked with people in the city of Guanajuato, most of them friends who studied at the University of Guanajuato, or people who worked at the marketplace of *Plaza de Baratillo* that I through time had learned to get to know. They wondered why I was in Guanajuato again, and why I was carrying around a movie camera. I told them about the film project with the family and that I was filming with them in various locations and in their social networks. When they learned to get to know that the grandmother in the family that I was filming was living at the nursing home *Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres* their reactions were filled with pity and scepticism, and they would often ask me for an explanation of why she had to be there. Living at a nursing home was seen as something that “*should not be*” by the local people that I communicated the research-project with. *Why can she not live with her family?* was their common question. In the reactions of the people in the city I experienced a social aspect of morality. Many of the inhabitants of Guanajuato considered it as a bad life that Dolores lived in a nursing home, as opposed to live a good life with family members. The view that Dolores’ living arrangement was not ideal and that it was outside the norms and expectations of the people in the city was also shared by Dolores herself, she did not want to live in the nursing home, neither did Dolores grown up children or grandson. The fact that Dolores was living at *Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres* was experienced as a deeply painful reality for the entire family.

Of the about 13500<sup>9</sup> elders above 60 years old who resided in Guanajuato City at the time of fieldwork, only 16 (15 women and 1 man) of them lived at the private owned nursing home *Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres*. In addition to the private owned nursing home there was also a state owned nursing home in Guanajuato, *Alberge Nicefóro Guerrero*, which in total had 25 residents (16 women and 9 men). This points to how living at a nursing home is a minority way of life for elders in the city, and further might say something about the other

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<sup>9</sup> INEGI: 7.9% of the population in Guanajuato are elders above 60 years old <http://www3.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/mexicocifras/default.aspx?e=11> Accessed on 29.05.2014

more common living-arrangements for elders in the city, namely that it has to be assumed that most elders live with their children, spouses or other forms of living.

When I interviewed the administrator at Albergue Nicefóro Guerrero she could tell that there were only three governmental run nursing homes in the entire Mexico. And there were no exact numbers on how many nursing homes that was driven by the various municipalities. Señor Javier, the nephew of the the owner of the nursing home where Dolores lived said that *“most shelters for elders are driven by religious groups or private initiative-takers and not by the government.”* Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres was one of these homes. It was driven by a patronage that had close connections with a Catholic Congregation<sup>10</sup>. The patronage had the control of the economy of the home, while the main responsible for the residents where the 4 Catholic Sisters, la madre Alta Gracia, madre Carmelita, madre Auxilio and madre Josephina. In addition to the Sisters there were also some paid workers at the nursing home. Coco had responsibility of the practical care of the residents, Brenda cleaned the building as well as the residents clothes, and Laura worked in the kitchen. At the State owned nursing home the economical aspect was taken care of by three administrators, and the elders were taken care of by nurses, a psychologist, and a social worker who all worked on shifts. In addition there were also workers in the kitchen and people women who worked as cleaners. Despite the differences in who provided care for the elders at the two nursing homes they had some similarities. One of these similarities was the fact that both of the buildings were adapted to make it possible for elders to live there. Both of the nursing homes did also to some extent expect the families of the elders to help the elders, for instance to take them for an outing. At Dolores nursing home there were more expectations towards the family members than at the state owned nursing home. Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres expected that family members provided the elders with a doctor, a dentist and medicine. Dolores family also needed to be responsible for having toilet paper, soap, shampoo, diapers and toothpaste in Dolores room. An elder in the private based nursing home was thus very much in need of close contact to their family members to live a healthy and secure life.

To live at Refugio Para Ancianos Cosme O. Torres the residents had to pay. Only two of the 16 elders at the home had a pension to pay for themselves. According to Elva Dolores Arias

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<sup>10</sup> Congregation of Misioneras Hijas de Nuestra Señora del Rosario de Fatima



Merino, geriatric Professor at the University of Guadalajara, 60% of the Adultos Mayores in Mexico do not have a pension. This makes them dependent upon their families, or others. Arias Merino explains further that 6 out of 10 elders are dependent on charity<sup>8</sup>. For those who could not pay for themselves and who did not have any familiars to pay for them was supported by the patronage. Some state support existed for elders without a pension. The Catholic Sisters at the nursing home knew about this support, and brought the residents to the local SEDESOL (The Secretary for Social Development) office, so that the resident without a pension could receive their 1500 pesos (85 Euros) every second month. In the overall population in Mexico only 10% of the elders who had the right to received the state support receives it<sup>11</sup>.

Expectations of care for elders is thus seen as the main responsibility of family members in the city, but care and support for elders also exists within structures of religious support, private support and state support.

## **4.2 DOLORES ON HER BED TALKING ABOUT HER PAST**

*Dolores: I was born the 20th of January in 1918 in Constanca 3 behind Teatro Juarez in the Cerro de San Miguel. I am quite old now, I think I am 84 years, you have to ask Leticia ,she knows these things better than I do. I grew up here in Guanajuato with my grandparents, parents and my six siblings, three sisters and three brothers. The oldest one was Miguel...or wait, maybe I am telling you lies. Yesterday my sons also came her and they asked me about the same things and Leticia had to tell them because I do not remember that well anymore.... My father was a doctor and my mother was a housewife. I studied, I reached until 6th grade, I only reached to primary school. I started to help my father with preparing medicine, organize appointments, and in this way I helped to pay the education for my brothers...Later I got married. I used to be with my father always, we went to Silao and Irapuato where we had appointments with patients. My father had a car and he contracted Salvador to be his chauffeur. Salvador walked behind me always and was very stubborn. One day at one of my birthday celebrations there was going to be a dance. Salvador hit a man in the face because the man invited me to dance. He was very jealous and he used to spy on me under my window at home. I did not want to go out with him, he was so stubborn.*

*Maria: - But you married him anyways, why?*

*Dolores: - I wanted to punish my grandfather. He was seeing a horrible woman that was not my grandmother and I wanted to make him upset. My father said it would have been better to kill me than that I went to marry*

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<sup>11</sup> Ocho TV Guadalajara “Mexico Un Pais que envejece en el abandono”

*Salvador... I went to live with him in Silao and until I got my first born daughter Lolita I did not have any contact with my family. I was going to suffer a lot. He was a horrible man, very jealous and he did not respect anyone. I think that was the reason why my father did not want me to leave with him. ...*

Leticia has entered to visit her mother and she had found her normal seat at the empty bed that stood on the opposite side of the room of Dolores bed. She had been listening to the words of her mother and she commented:

Leticia: - *You only suffered..*

Dolores: - *Tears of blood..*

After a while Salvador and Dolores moved back to Guanajuato where Dolores had grown up. She started to use her cooking skills that she had learned from her grandmother and to board students at the apartment where they lived. The students rented rooms at her home while they were studying away from home. They followed the rules of the house and ate their meals in Dolores kitchen. Her husband Salvador was dedicated to the bottle, and to sell scarfs along the highways. He could be away for long periods of time and when he came back from the road it happened that he was very violent with Dolores. Salvador did not let her wife leave the house to see her girlfriends. She was only allowed to leave the house when she needed to buy groceries in the supermarket.

*He flirted a lot with other women, he had a lot of them. He came into fights with the students at our place and some of them went to say it to their parents. My entire youth was horrible, I was only happy with my children. I worked until all my children studied, until all of them had a career. Chava and Enrique went to study medicine in Mexico City, and my brothers helped me to pay their education. Lolita and Araceli studied to become hairdressers, while Leticia was still little and studied primary school, secondary school and high school here, until she finally commuted to Leon to study Social Work. I was only happy with my children. When they came back for vacation from their studies I was happy and I felt protected.*

Leticia: - *I remember my father as an angry man, he used to be violent, but sometimes he gave me a lot of hugs. They had their problems as a couple, my dad was very good with me, I think I felt more love from him, my mum loved me but she never showed it that much, like giving me a hug or kiss, but she showed it in the way she took care of me, to be awake of the things that happened to us, what we needed. And my dad showed his love in another way, but he was more distanced from his responsibility as a dad, he never worried about where we lived or what we ate, and as a woman my mum she worried more about that. She was the one in charge of the entire family. Because of my mum we got a career, she worked to get us forward...she cared about the fact that we were going to school. The siblings of my mum was also helping my brothers a lot when they went to study. My uncle Enrique and uncle Miguel, they helped my siblings.*

Maria: - *To pay University?*

*Leticia: - Yes they helped my mum with economy so they could go and study. I was here with her.*

*Maria: - But you also went to study in Leon?*

*Leticia: - Yes but the differences in expenses to go to Mexico and to Leon was huge..with me my mum normally made me food that I carried with me..it was less expenses with me. With me it was 3 years and with them 6 years and when they finished..they never went back home. They got married and they went out and never returned back home, the same happened with my sisters. I was the only one who stayed with my parents.*

Salvador fell one day when Leticia had started to study her higher education in Leon. He became sick and died at the hospital.

*Dolores: - Life became more peaceful after his death. And when I changed from having mainly girls to live at my place to have boys, things got even better. The boys showed more respect, they took care of me, they loved me a lot and I loved them.*

When Leticia got pregnant and Rodrigos father left Leticia got a lot of help during her pregnancy from her mother, and when Rodrigo was born the three of them lived together. As Rodrigo got older he started in a kindergarden and Leticia got a work in the governmental institution DIF. She would go away to the countrysides of Guanajuato and weight malnourished children. She loved her work, and it enabled her to take up a loan and buy the house in Mesquetito where she wanted to live with Rodrigo. But as Rodrigo got older he preferred to be with his grandmother who spoiled him both in the practical doings in life and who helped him economically. Dolores received economical support from her now educated sons that had work and she gladly shared the money in the upbringing of Rodrigo. After a while Leticia outed from her work in the governmental institution. She understood that the work they did while out in the field did not actually help the families that they met, but was pure statistics that the government developed for the University of Guanajuato. She reported this, something which was not popular among the patrons, and she decided to opt out of the formal economy and into the informal economy voluntarily and due to ideological reasons. She thus started to get a more insecure income, and she became more dependent upon the economy that her mother received from her elderly brothers who worked as doctors.

### 4.3 CHANGES OF LIVING ARRANGEMENTS FOR DOLORES

Seen from the perspective of the brothers and the sisters of Leticia the fact that both Rodrigo and Leticia were dependent upon the economical support that they gave their mother was a dynamic that they did not want to continue. Chava and his siblings could see that the easy access of money was not good for Rodrigo who started to drink a lot of alcohol, and that it did not put pressure upon their sister Leticia to work and be part of society, not to be dependent upon them.

Leticia: *“My siblings decided not to help anymore. They decided to get rid of the department where my mother lived...They said that I was a parasite, that I was spending time with my mum because they gave her money. Actually it has more like the book “Water for Chocolate”. Tita, the youngest one in the book had to take care of her mum. For me it was not a problem that I had to take care of my mum, because she really took care of me in my childhood, but sometimes I feel like a servant. That my siblings tell me, Leticia do this and do that. No. I feel like my siblings forget about many things.*

Dolores well-off children decided to get rid of the department, and they had to find a new place for Dolores.

Leticia: *One of my sisters she said to my mother when they decided not to give money anymore; “Do you go to a nursing home, or do you go with me?” So they brought her with them and they left me with all the work to fix her apartment. I sold some furniture, and they brought her to San Luis Potosi. She didn't want to go. After fifteen days she fell and injured her hip. I couldn't see her that much at that time because I had problems with my siblings, but I went there when they operated her, and after that she didn't want to live outside Guanajuato anymore. My siblings saw it, and I told them that she could come to live at my place. Their thought had been that she could live with Araceli in San Luis Potosi for a while, then with Salvador (Chava), then Enrique in Leon, then with my sister in Mexico and then some time with me, but she didn't want to. My mother did not want to go to San Luis Potosi, nor to Leon or Mexico. She wanted to be here in Guanajuato where she has lived her entire life. So I said that she could be here with me. She came here and she was together with me.*

After the family realised that Dolores was not happy outside Guanajuato it was decided that she should live with Leticia in Mesquetito 9 in Guanajuato.

*But one December I felt really bad myself...I have problems with my legs. I told my siblings to help me to take care of her. I needed to go to sell the shoes and the jelly. I said that I wanted them to help me, just for a little while. I wanted them to help me out during a weekend or so, some days that they would say to me: “ do you know Leticia, just go and relax, and we will take care of mum for a while”. It could be for only two days or so, but they didn't want to. That's why I decided that I couldn't live like that anymore. Here there are a lot of stairs. I couldn't help her alone. Guanajuato is up and down and I can hardly walk myself, and for her it is even harder.*

*For me alone it was hard to take care of her, and I lost faith. They give money, but that is not all. I need them to help me in a moral way. I lost faith because they thought to give her money to eat was everything. I also needed some distractions. I needed to be distanced from the preoccupations; What if she does not eat? What if she falls? I helped her to shower, give her the medicine, give her food five times a day. And if I went out to sell something I left her biscuits, yoghurt or jelly so she would eat. If I did not do that I would have had to be there all the time to see that she eat... Sometimes I could see that the food was in the garbage when I came back from the city, and I was worrying that her sugar level would go down and she could die. I couldn't do it and we are five children, and they left me all alone. Initially I decided to be with her voluntary, I felt that since I did not make my life with someone else I could be with her, but I just couldn't take it all alone.*

Leticia could not handle to take care of Dolores all by herself, the pressure was too big and it was decided that Dolores finally had to move into a nursing home. None of the family members were happy about this situation. Leticia feels that other people in the city judge her because she is not taking care of her mother at home anymore, though she herself thinks that many people in the city are hypocrites. On the surface it might seem like they take care for their elders at home, but in fact many family members might abandon their elders at home, or mistreat them. “*Not every elder that lives at home live a dignified life*”, as she says. This is supported by researchers that have done investigations on the link between dependency and domestic violence (Bornstein 2006). Leticia also feels that her own siblings are angry with her because of the fact that she said that she could not take care of Dolores in her own home anymore. The siblings have a problematic relationship with each other. They do not talk much, and Leticia is not invited to children's birthdays and other reunions in the extended family. The only place where they meet is at the nursing home with their mother. The sorrow felt by the entire family for their mothers stay at a nursing home, as well as the intense conflict it has caused in between them might point to how care for elders is generally looked upon as a moral responsibility of the family in the social environment of Guanajuato City. The fact that Dolores despite all these morally loaded reactions is living in a nursing home can to some extent explain the high intensity of difficult emotions the family members live with. And through expressing these emotions the family can show to the outside world that they are not happy about the situation, and that they are suffering. In the social exchanges where expectations of care have not been met in the family, restrictive behaviours or negative acts have weakened the relationships between the siblings. On the other hand the past of the family members shows how family life have been based on inequality between genders. How men often have gotten more support than women to go through education. And how the fact

that Dolores children newer came back to live in Guanajuato after finishing their studies have been part of the separation of the extended family union and support as such. What despite all these challenges is clear is that the entire family wants to support Dolores as much as they can so she will not feel alone and left behind there at the nursing home. They all want her to feel that they care about her and that she shall live a life of dignity despite the circumstances. The family members does this in different ways.

#### **4.4 THE POINT OF VIEWS OF THE FAMILY MEMBERS ABOUT DOLORES SITUATION**

**Leticia** expressed her emotions for her mothers situation this way:

Leticia:

*"...I feel such a sadness, how can I tell you? I know that she feels.. Sometimes I think about the fact that she gave us everything she had. She worked so hard for us. And now she is not even able to live at home...in her own home. A place where she feels at home and that is a part of her. Surrounded by her memories. All those things from her youth. It is just that I am thinking... (starts to cry) that if she dies...well she has to die, like me and the entire world but... I am so afraid she will be alone, with no one from the family with her. Why does it have to be like that? This was her path. But I suppose I could have told her "mum, come back and live in with me again, and lets see how I can manage to having you fed and..." Yes. That is the human process right? One do reach an age where one can not take care of oneself anymore, and someone else must decide the very life of another person. Because you have lost your powers, your body has grown old. You don't have enough money. No. One can not know how ones life will end right?"*

Rodrigo, Dolores 27 year old grandson expressed his sorrow in a quite different manner than his mother. While not completely sober, and when talking with his grandmother on an outing in the city garden Dolores had told Rodrigo that one of the residents at the home had died lately, and that he had to be prepared that the same might happen to her in the future as well, after all *"I am 94 years old now"*, said Dolores.

Rodrigo: - *You should tell your sons that! You should ask your sons why they put you there (in the nursing home)! There is no other reason that they put you there than to see that you die.*

Dolores: - *Don't say that because that is not the reason.*

R: - *No one wants to take care of you.*

D: - *Can you take care of me? It has to be you, all of you.*

R: - *Everybody loves you, but despite that they put you there. I guess they did that to avoid feeling remorse if you were going to die near them.*

D: - *Don't say that.*

R: - *I am young I see the things in another way grandma.*

D: - *Don't say that.*

R: - *It's the truth. That is the truth. Enrique (Dolores youngest son) don't take care of anything, but no one judges him because he has done a lot with his life. He is responsible and grown up. Chava as well (Dolores oldest son). He worked for many years... so did Lola and Araceli (Dolores two other daughters)..that's the truth. Let us give Leticia some points now, because she is actually the one who brings you to the city garden (the three family members start to laugh).*

Dolores youngest daughter Leticia and her grandson Rodrigo suffer from emotions of sorrow, guilt and anger by Dolores situation and they have a hard time to accept life as it is. Dolores is not happy to live at the nursing home either, it is not an ideal way of life, but she tries to see through both her own and her families challenging emotions and accept the situation as it is.

#### **4.5 DYNAMICS OF FAMILY CARE FOR DOLORES AT THE NURSING HOME**

We see that if we are trying to grasp the perspectives of the various family members it is not difficult to understand the rationality of their actions. They are not bad people, but tried to act on what they thought was the best solution in taking care of their mother. Yet so, they end up in a situation that is not desirable for any of them. It is easy to see the pressure each of them is exposed to, and it is also easy to identify events in the past that makes the siblings to be up against each other. The brothers who have provided financial assistance and Leticia on her side which has served as the primary caregiver for their mother, something which seemed not to be praised by the others.

The dynamics of how the family members supported their mother continues to be similar as to how it had been in the past also after Dolores moved to the nursing home. Leticia is the one who is closest to her mother and who sees her daily. She is the emotional support that Dolores needs to not feel left behind and forgotten. She is the one who makes Dolores feel that she has connection with her family.

Leticia is out of work and have a lot of time to come to visit her mum. What is not so fortunate is Leticia's lack of a secure income, making her incapable of helping her mum to have a doctor, a dentist, medicine or other items. For that she has to rely on Chava and Enrique, the two sons who lives in the neighbouring city Leon, and Araceli, the oldest daughter who lives in another state. The three of them pay Dolores room, but they do not have the opportunity to see her a lot. In the time of fieldwork it was Chava, Enrique and Araceli that would pay the mensal fee to the nursing home so Dolores could live there. This transaction of money went straight to the nursing home, something which did not give Leticia or Rodrigo access for economical support on her behalf anymore.



## **CHAPTER 5: MODERNISATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILY LIFE**

In order to be able to understand the background of the dynamics that unfolds in the family, it becomes necessary to look a bit at the overall development of society which this 'family drama' is unfolded within. The internal dynamics of the family understood as their social interactions with each other has to be seen as parts of external dynamics of social changes. These dynamics of higher scale can be said to constitute both pressures and create opportunities for people. In this chapter I will go into and analyse some of these structures that might have had and have implications on the Guanajuatense- family and their lives on the ground.

### **5.1 STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS ON FAMILY LIFE**

*In “primitive” societies it has been said that man usually ordered his social world in the idiom of kinship. Anthropologist not only accepted the indigenous kinship idiom as having primary significance, but also based their theoretical constructs for the understanding of human behaviour and society upon kinship” (Johnson&Bond 1974:56).*

In these societies family members had roles where the tasks, norms and expectations connected to the roles were clear.

In the confrontations on care that have been explored throughout this thesis one can not say that the roles of the family members are clear, nor that the family members orient their behaviour solely for the sake of family. In complex societies as in comparison with “primitive” societies the social behaviours of individuals are not buildt only due to the maintainance of the family. As has been dicussed earlier in this research the family members are connected to different groups and values and have feelings of loyalty to more groups than just the family group, and even to various ideologies. Family life is important, but not the only idiom in which individuals base their behaviour. Taking it into consideration that there exist many expectations on family care as we have seen from the lives of Leticia, Rodrigo and

Dolores we can assume that the type of family orientation as described in the “primitie societies” has been a part of Guanajuatos social world in the past.

Though Guanajuato City always has been a cultural meeting point due to colonialisation and the expansion of the labour force, it has to be assumed that the city has gone through changes which can be described as a developmental process, an evolutionary process, or a process from “primitive” society into a more “modern” or complex society. For instance, Guanajuato City as well as other cities in the world and in Latin-America as such has undergone a growth in population (Flanagan 2010:35). From being considered to be a charmy province buildt on small family businesses<sup>12</sup> when Dolores was a child Guanajuato has transitioned into a city where these traditional family ways of organization are becoming less and less common and is substituted by other forms of global businesses, a world in which Rodrigo has grown up. This change and the development of Guanajuato started particularly in Mexico in the 1980s. This was a time when Mexico experienced a process of economic restructuring to neoliberalism and open markets<sup>13</sup> in the search for economic development. The economical model of neoliberalism, privatization and trade liberation in Mexico was expected to result in job creation (Jonakin 2006 in Biles 2008:542), but what has been the outcome is on the other hand the downsizing of the state, the reduction of traditional sources of public sector employment and creation of more temporary, low wage and unprotected employment (International Labor Organization 2005; Marquez et al. 2007 in Biles 2008:542). Something which has increased the insecurity and tension in the daily lives for families in Guanajuato and other cities.

Patterns of economic change and urban growth in Third World countries have for the most part reflected those nations economic and political ties to the rest of the world (Flanagan 2010:192). And even though I will not go deeper into it here one can assume that many demographic changes have accured in Guanajuato due to the modernization process, which have similarities with processes that have occured in the West. Some of these characteristics on changes in the human conditions can for example be the creation of nuclear household

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<sup>12</sup> Plaza de Baratillo is one market place where this change can be visible. Where small family businesses of food-stands live side by side with big chains like for example Dominos Pizza.

<sup>13</sup> The implementation of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) on 1st of January 1994 which links Mexico with Canada and the United States as being part of this neoliberal ideology and global capitalism.

models, female participation in labour market, higher education, greater uncertainty for families, greater geographical distances between generations of families and population ageing.

These demographic shifts have in turn implications on family systems and support, and can alter people's expectations, roles and the length of time spent in the conventional life course (Izuhara 2010:2). Demographic changes and shifting social norms can put greater tension on family life, and produce more diversity in family and household structures, which in turn can led to varied attitudes and relations between generations (Izuhara 2010: 1) than what a former version and less developed Guanajuato city had in the past. was more stable and secure, has transformed into a condition of being unstable and insecure.

## **5.2 THE SHOCK BETWEEN FAMILY IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT**

Ferdinand Tonnies is a scientist who implemented the words *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to describe the shift that took place through modernisation. According to him the pre-modern stage could be described as a community where there was a feeling of unity, stability and where the webs of relationships within it was seasoned with age. Whereas the latter could be described as a society or city with the division of social class, which created tensions between the interests of capital and labour, and was characterised by hostility and without no natural place for family (Tonnies in Flanagan 2010:72-73).

The catalyst factor that forced Dolores to move was exactly based upon this division of social classes between the siblings. The interest of the capital that the richer sibling used to maintain Dolores was of interest for Leticia and Rodrigo who were the poor parts of the family, something which created tension between the various parts of the family. It created division more than union. A division that can be said to have been created due to demographical changes in the society. First and foremost by the fact that Leticia had been a single-parent which could explain her struggle to survive economically by herself. The division of

distanced household also enhanced the division between us and them through the less face-to-face contact which enhanced unity between the members. These household units also did not have a common goal in maintaining each other, but had goals in maintaining themselves and what were of their own interests. Within these aspects that divided the family and which made Leticia's brothers sell the apartment to get rid of the problem of dependent family members there were also some norms that remained. The norm to help their mother. Which in turn makes it look like individuals within a family can choose what they want to keep and what they want to change of the existing ideas of what family has been in the past and what it is and can be in the future. The family members themselves are because of this a part of the process of evolution, where they can stick to traditions or open for change. When they open for change (for example by opening up for the opportunity of Dolores to live in a nursing home) there is a crisis that puts the family in the transition to a new stage. This critical stage might awaken new values and new expectations that makes the process of evolution continue. After the changes there might be a reorganisation. And if the opposite is the case, if people avoid changes and stick to traditions the result is no evolution and fewer changes (Fairlie&Frisansho 1998:44).

Another anthropologist who has commented upon change in societies is Ingrid Rudie who has done long-term fieldwork on the topic of women, change and continuity in the East Coast Malay Society. Rudie has written that:

*Anything that is recognised as "not doing" is recognised against the background of something that exists as an ideal or a possibility. There are numbers of unfulfilled wishes, and exchanges that are never made and these are often modelled on what was practice under the social and economic circumstances that governed local life a couple of decades ago...If expectations are systematically thwarted, we can begin to discern a trend of change. It is change in environmental conditions that bends people's practice ( Rudie 1994:132-133).*

The emotional conflicts that emerge within individuals as well as between individuals on expectations on family care as seen in the empirical examples in this paper can be interpreted as existing because of the demographic changes in society. When Dolores has to live in a nursing home it can be because the family structure is not as it once was, the environmental conditions has changed. The family has gone through various demographic changes such as taking higher education and working in other cities than that of where they were born, which

in turn makes the geographical distance big for the family generations. This might leave the various households of the family with no guidelines for where Dolores is going to live. The expectation of Dolores to live in her family and be taken care of by them is thus challenged. Living in with ones family members is not an easy endeavour. The family is spread, the households have fewer members, and there are more pressures put upon the nuclear families in taking care due to the few members, and due to other responsibilities they have such as having to earn for a living though the caretaker is a woman. All these factors might have been unthinkable a decade ago, but the way of thinking that existed a decade ago continue to exist. The expectations of the people in the city as well as in the mindsets of the family members that Dolores should live with her family is confronted by the actual reality of 94 year old Dolores who has to live at a nursing home due to the circumstances. Something which can be an expression of how values and mindsets do not change as fast as the actual demographic changes in the society.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Through participant observation with and without a movie camera I have made a close study over time in a family in Guanajuato. Many situations and aspects about this family is unique to the family, such as for instance the demographic spread of the family, internal differences in access to economic resources, and special events that have affected the solidarity and their providence of care. I see this variation as a strength in that it reflects the mosaic of families that exist out there, that there is no family with the same story. Yet it is also possible to see some trends of a general nature that affects large parts of the Mexican community through the lives of the family. The providence of care is in change due to demographic changes in society. These changes on care structures creates conflicts in a family because individuals fail to live up to expectations and norms of care that have used to be followed in the past. The family does not have the same opportunities to care for one another in face-to face interactions anymore, they are divided by geographical distance that have emerged due to a modernisation process where the place of job opportunities is the important factor for where an educated person settle. On a micro-level relationships on care in the present are also connected to the exchanges of care that has happened or not happened in the past.

By entering into close relationships with particular three people representing three generations of this family, but also to attempt to identify and understand the other members of the family I have tried to get an insight into the dynamics that develop. I have thus attempted to base my analysis on the perspectives of the family members that live in Guanajuato, but tried to make the study multi- vocal.

One of the most important findings in the study has been that *“individuals are enmeshed in multiple relations that may be in play simultaneously”* (Han 2012:233). Or as Deluze writes: *to explore “combatz-between, meaning the combat not as between self and the other, but rather between forces that cross the self”* (Deluze in Han 2012:233). According to Han the *scene of combats between the self is where care and support takes shape, through patience, waiting, awakening, and enduring, and also where cruelty manifests; the difficulty of being in another persons present* (Han 2012:233).

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